

Message Text

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PAGE 01 TEL AV 09995 01 OF 02 041816Z
ACTION NEA-10

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 4689
INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN
AMEMBASSY BEIRUT
AMEMBASSY BONN
AMEMBASSY CAIRO IMMEDIATE
AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
AMEMBASSY JIDDA
AMEMBASSY KUWAIT
AMEMBASSY LONDON
AMEMBASSY PARIS
USMISSION USUN NY
USMISSION SINAI
AMCONSUL JERUSALEM IMMEDIATE

UNCLAS SECTION 1 OF 2 TEL AVIV 9995

JERUSALEM FOR ATHERTON AND S/S; NEA FOR IAI

E. O. 11652: NA
TAGS: PEPR IS EG US
SUBJ: JERUSALEM POST ARTICLE ON USG REACTION TO LATEST TURN
IN PEACE NEGOTIATIONS

TODAY'S (AUG 4) JERUSALEM POST FEATURED THE FOLLOWING
ARTICLE BY ITS WASHINGTON-BASED CORRESPONDENT, WOLF
BLITZER. ALTHOUGH BLITZER'S STORIES ARE USUALLY ALSO
CARRIED IN AL HAMISHMAR (IN HEBREW TRANSLATION), THIS
ARTICLE APPEARED IN THE POST ONLY.

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PAGE 02 TEL AV 09995 01 OF 02 041816Z

BEGIN TEXT:
PRESIDENT SADAT'S SURPRISE DECISION TO SUSPEND THE PEACE NEGOTIATIONS WITH ISRAEL PERSONALLY INFURIATED PRESIDENT CARTER, SECRETARY OF STATE CYRUS VANCE AND OTHER SENIOR US OFFICIALS BECAUSE THEY SAW IT AS A RETURN TO SADAT'S WORN-OUT "SHOCK DIPLOMACY" TACTICS

OF THE PAST.

CARTER HAD BEEN ASSURED BY SADAT LAST FEBRUARY AT THEIR LENGTHY CAMP DAVID, MARYLAND, TALKS THAT THE US, IN THE FUTURE, WOULD NO LONGER FIND ITSELF SURPRISED BY EGYPTIAN ACTIONS AND DECISIONS, AS HAD BEEN THE CASE A MONTH EARLIER WHEN SADAT SUDDENLY RECALLED HIS FOREIGN MINISTER FROM THE ILL-FATED POLITICAL COMMITTEE TALKS IN JERUSALEM.

THE U.S. DECISION TO CRITICIZE SADAT'S LATEST MOVE -- A DECISION MADE AT THE HIGHEST LEVELS OF THE GOVERNMENT FOLLOWING AN INTENSIVE STRATEGY SESSION WHICH CARTER HELD WITH HIS SENIOR AIDES AT CAMP DAVID -- REFLECTED THE PRESIDENT'S FEELING THAT SADAT HAD RENEGED ON THAT COMMITMENT. IT ALSO UNDERSCORED VANCE'S PERSONAL FRUSTRATION OVER WHAT HE REGARDED AS SADAT'S BACKTRACKING ON AN EGYPTIAN COMMITMENT TO CONTINUE THE LEEDS CASTLE FOREIGN MINISTERS TALKS DURING HIS RETURN MISSION TO THE M-E.

"WE ARE VERY DISAPPOINTED THAT SADAT HAS ANNOUNCED THAT EGYPT WILL NOT PARTICIPATE IN ANOTHER ROUND OF NEGOTIATIONS WITH ISRAEL UNDER PRESENT CIRCUMSTANCES," - THE STATE DEPARTMENT SAID ON MONDAY. IT REPRESENTED THE FIRST TIME IN MANY MONTHS THAT EGYPT WAS CRITICIZED BY THE U.S.

VANCE, A CAUTIOUS DIPLOMAT WHO, UNLIKE HIS BOSS, PRESIDENT CARTER, DOES NOT SHOOT FROM THE HIP IN HIS PUBLIC STATEMENTS, FELT SADAT HAD MADE THE U.S. LOOK FOOLISH. ON JULY 19, VANCE WOUND UP THE LEEDS CASTLE TALKS BY HOLDING A PRESS CONFERENCE, WHICH HE OPENED BY READING A CAREFULLY DRAFTED STATEMENT, CLEARED IN ADVANCE BY BOTH EGYPT AND ISRAEL.

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PAGE 03 TEL AV 09995 01 OF 02 041816Z

"I ANTICIPATE THERE WILL BE FURTHER MEETINGS WHEN I GO TO THE MIDDLE EAST IN ABOUT TWO WEEKS," HE SAID. LATER, IN RESPONSE TO QUESTIONING, THE SECRETARY ELABORATED BY NOTING THAT THE ADDITIONAL MEETINGS WILL BE "SIMILAR TO THE MEETING WHICH WE HAVE BEEN HOLDING HERE DURING THE LAST TWO DAYS."

U.S. SOURCES SAY THE EGYPTIAN COMMITMENT TO CONTINUE THE DIRECT NEGOTIATIONS WAS MADE BY SADAT PERSONALLY, NOT MERELY BY FOREIGN MINISTER MOHAMMED IBRAHIM KAMEL, WHOSE AUTHORITY IS CLEARLY LIMITED. WITHOUT SUCH A SADAT PLEDGE, VANCE WOULD HAVE REMAINED SILENT.

ON JULY 23, AFTER VANCE RETURNED TO WASHINGTON, HE TOLD A NATIONWIDE TELEVISION AUDIENCE THAT HE EXPECTED TO CHAIR ANOTHER ROUND OF ISRAELI-EGYPTIAN NEGOTIATIONS DURING HIS MIDDLE EAST TRIP. IN FACT, UNTIL LAST SUNDAY, THE DAY SADAT DROPPED HIS BOMBSHELL FOLLOWING A MEETING WITH SPECIAL ENVOY ALFRED AHERTON, THE STATE DEPARTMENT WAS REPEATING CONFIDENTLY NEARLY EVERY DAY THAT ANOTHER MEETING WAS EXPECTED.

AS A RESULT OF SADAT'S ANNOUNCEMENT, VANCE HAS NO DOUBT LOST MUCH OF THE CONFIDENCE HE ONCE HELD IN THE EGYPTIAN LEADER. IF SOMEONE WOULD HAVE ASKED THE SECRETARY AND HIS AIDES BEFORE LAST SUNDAY WHAT THE CHANCES WERE THAT SADAT WOULD BACK OUT OF THE RESUMED TALKS, THEY WOULD HAVE SAID: "VIRTUALLY NONE." THEY

TRUSTED HIS WORD, THEY BELIEVED HIM. THEY WERE DEALING WITH A NEW SADAT.

AND THIS IS EXACTLY WHY THEY ARE NOW SO DISAPPOINTED IN SADAT. THEY FEEL THAT THEY MISCALCULATED SOMEHOW, THAT THEY MISUNDERSTOOD. VANCE, DURING HIS TALKS WITH SADAT, IS HOPING TO HAVE WHAT THE AMERICANS ARE NOW CALLING A REAL "HEART-TO-HEART" EXCHANGE BECAUSE THEY BELIEVE THAT SERIOUS NEGOTIATIONS CANNOT TAKE PLACE SO LONG AS "SHOCK DIPLOMACY" IS PRACTISED.

IN TRYING TO PICK UP THE PIECES, THE AMERICANS

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PAGE 01 TEL AV 09995 02 OF 02 041954Z
ACTION NEA-10

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INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN

AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

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AMEMBASSY CAIRO IMMEDIATE

AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

AMEMBASSY JIDDA

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UNCLAS SECTION 2 OF 2 TEL AVIV 9995

JERUSALEM FOR ATHERTON AND S/S; NEA FOR IAI

ARE SAYING THAT THEY WILL MAKE IT ABSOLUTELY CLEAR TO SADAT DURING THE VANCE MISSION THAT THE US WILL NOT -- IN FACT CANNOT -- PUT FORWARD IDEAS OF ITS OWN SO LONG AS THE NEGOTIATIONS HAVE BEEN SUSPENDED. THEY DO NOT WANT SADAT TO BE UNDER ANY ILLUSIONS.

THAT WAS WHY VANCE, DURING HIS CLOSED-DOOR BRIEFING FOR THE SENATE FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE ON TUESDAY, AND STATE

DEPARTMENT SPOKESMAN HODDING CARTER, DURING HIS BRIEFINGS TO THE PRESS THROUGH THE ENTIRE WEEK, DENIED SO STRONGLY THAT ANY US SUGGESTIONS WOULD BE MADE DURING THE VANCE MISSION. THERE CAN
UNCLASSIFIED

UNCLASSIFIED

PAGE 02 TEL AV 09995 02 OF 02 041954Z

BE US IDEAS ONLY WHEN THERE ARE ACTUAL NEGOTIATIONS UNDERWAY, THEY SAID. NO TALKS, NO US IDEAS.

THE MESSAGE TO SADAT WAS CLEAR: IF YOU WANT SOME US PROPOSALS, BEGIN THE TALKS ONCE AGAIN WITH ISRAEL. "WHAT WE HAVE SAID ALL ALONG ON THIS IS THAT WE BELIEVE THERE HAVE TO BE NEGOTIATIONS BETWEEN THE PARTIES," VANCE SAID ON TUESDAY WHEN ASKED ABOUT AN AMERICAN PLAN. "WHEN THEY RUN INTO OBSTACLES, WE WILL FEEL OURSELVES FREE TO MAKE SUGGESTIONS TO THE PARTIES TO TRY TO OVERCOME THOSE OBSTACLES, AND THAT REMAINS OUR POSITION."

PRIVATELY, US SOURCES WILL ACKNOWLEDGE THAT SAUDI ARABIA IS NOW ADVISING SADAT TO DROP HIS ENTIRE PEACE INITIATIVE, AND TO RETURN TO THE CONCEPT OF AN ALL-ARAB DELEGATION AT A RECONVENED GENEVA PEACE CONFERENCE.

PUBLICLY, THE STATE DEPARTMENT IS MAINTAINING THAT THE SAUDIS "REMAIN COMMITTED TO THE PEACE PROCESS." BUT IT IS NOT COMMENTING ON WHETHER THE SAUDIS ARE STILL SUPPORTING SADAT'S INITIATIVE. FOR THE SAUDIS THE "PEACE PROCESS" APPARENTLY MEANS GENEVA. THEY ARE STILL SEARCHING FOR THAT ILLUSIVE (SIC) GOAL OF ARAB UNITY.

THE AMERICANS, WHEN ASKED TO EXPLAIN WHY SADAT SEEMS TO HAVE A CHANGE OF HEART, ARE POINTING TO THE SAUDI ROLE -- BUT ONLY AS ONE OF THE REASONS. THERE ARE OTHER FACTORS, INCLUDING SADAT'S ANGER AT PRIME MINISTER BEGIN FOR REJECTING A PROPOSAL TO RETURN TO EGYPTIAN CIVILIAN CONTROL EL ARISH AND MOUNT SINAI (JEBEL MUSSA) AS A GESTURE OF ISRAELI GOODWILL.

PARTICULARLY THE EGYPTIAN PRESIDENT IS STILL UPSET BY BEGIN'S ASSERTION THAT NO ONE RECEIVES "SOMETHING FOR NOTHING." SADAT REPORTEDLY ASKED ATHERTON: "WAS MY TRIP TO JERUSALEM NOTHING"?

SADAT'S FRUSTRATION OVER THE BEGIN REMARK WAS NOT EASED BY THE DECISION TO EXPEL THE ISRAELI MILITARY DELEGATION. SADAT FELT THAT HE HAD TO DO SOMETHING ELSE, LIKE SUSPEND THE DIRECT NEGOTIATIONS WITH ISRAEL.

IN ADDITION TO THE SAUDI PRESSURES BUILDING UP AGAINST SADAT
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PAGE 03 TEL AV 09995 02 OF 02 041954Z

THERE HAVE ALSO BEEN REPORTS THAT SADAT WAS FACING INCREASED INTERNAL OPPOSITION TO HIS PEACE INITIATIVE, ESPECIALLY FROM CERTAIN MILITARY CIRCLES. US SOURCES ACKNOWLEDGE THAT THEY HAVE RECEIVED SUCH REPORTS, BUT THEY MAINTAIN THAT THERE HAS BEEN A CERTAIN DEGREE OF DOMESTIC OPPOSITION WITHIN EGYPT ALL ALONG, AND THEY DOUBT WHETHER SADAT MOVED AT THIS TIME SOLELY BECAUSE

OF IT.

THE AMERICANS, HOWEVER, DO BELIEVE THAT SADAT WAS GENUINELY BECOMING MORE AND MORE FRUSTRATED BY THE SLOW PACE OF THE TALKS AND THE LACK OF PROGRESS. HE WANTED RESULTS QUICKLY, SOMETHING TO WHICH HE COULD POINT AS PROVING HIS DECISION TO GO TO JERUSALEM WAS WORTHWHILE. AFTER HIS PROPOSAL TO WIN BACK EL ARISH AND MOUNT SINAI WAS SCORNE, THE FRUSTRATION GREW.

THIS ALL BOILS DOWN TO A "SALVAGE OPERATION FOR VANCE. NO ONE HERE HAS YET WRITTEN THE PACE INITIATIVE OFF COMPLETELY. THERE IS STILL HOPE THAT IT CAN BE REVIVED. THE COMING DAYS WILL TELL. IN MANY RESPECTS, IT'S NOW OR NEVER.

IT WOULD BE A GRAVE ERROR FOR ISRAELI OFFICIALS TO SIT BACK, OBSERVE THE CURRENT US ANGER TOWARDS EGYPT, AND SMILE. IT IS TRUE THAT EGYPT TODAY IS RECEIVING THE BRUNT OF THE US CRITICISM, NOT ISRAEL.

BUT THAT COULD -- AND PROBABLY WILL -- CHANGE VERY QUICKLY IF THE TALKS SHOULD EVENTUALLY COLLAPSE ONCE AND FOR ALL. A FULL-SCALE POST-MORTEM AMONG THE AMERICAN LEADERSHIP WILL FIND THAT EGYPT WAS NOT ALONE IN BLAME; ISRAEL HAD ITS GREATEST OPPORTUNITY EVER TO REACH PEACE WITH EGYPT BUT SOMEHOW MISSED IT.

PERHAPS IT WAS THE EXCESSIVE HAGGLING, THE NEW INTERPRETATION OF UN SECURITY COUNCIL RESOLUTION 242, THE SETTLEMENT ACTIVITY, BEGIN'S PERSONAL STYLE OF RIGID DIPLOMACY AND IDEOLOGICAL COMMITMENT. A NASTY MOOD OF "A PLAGUE ON BOTH YOUR HOUSES" COULD TURN OUT TO BE THE ULTIMATE RESPONSE AMONG AMERICAN PUBLIC OPINION. AND UNDER SUCH CIRCUMSTANCES, ISRAEL WOULD SURELY NOT EMERGE AS A VICTOR. IN FACT, WITHOUT PEACE, ISRAEL AND EVERYONE ELSE WILL TURN OUT TO BE THE LOSERS. END TEXT
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PAGE 04 TEL AV 09995 02 OF 02 041954Z

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